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Open THE Heavens

THROUGH TEMPLE AND
FAMILY HISTORY WORK



By President
Russell M. Nelson

President of the
Quorum of the
Twelve Apostles
And by Wendy W.
Nelson

During their 2017 RootsTech presentation, President Russell M. Nelson and his wife, Wendy, invited Latter-day Saints to prayerfully consider what kind of sacrifice they can make in order to do more temple and family history work.

President Nelson: When my grandfather A. C. Nelson was a young husband and father, just 27 years old, his father died. About three months later, his deceased father, my great-grandfather, came to visit him. The date of that visit was the night of April 6, 1891. Grandfather Nelson was so impressed by his father's visit that he wrote the experience in his journal for his family and friends.

"I was in bed when Father entered the room," Grandfather Nelson wrote. "He came and sat on the side of the bed. He said, 'Well, my son, as I had a few spare minutes, I received permission to come and see you for a few minutes. I am feeling well, my son, and have had very much to do since I died.'"

When Grandfather Nelson asked him what he had been doing, his father answered that he had been busy teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ in the spirit world.

"You cannot imagine, my son, how many spirits there are in the spirit world who have not yet received the gospel," he said. "But many are receiving it, and a great work is being accomplished. Many are anxiously looking forth to their friends who are still living to administer for them in the temples."

Grandfather Nelson told his father, "We intend to go to the temple and get sealed to you, Father, as soon as we can."



A. C. Nelson, grandfather of President Russell M. Nelson.

My great-grandfather responded: “That, my son, is partly what I came to see you about. We will yet make a family and live throughout eternity.”

Then Grandfather Nelson asked, “Father, is the gospel as taught by this Church true?”

His father pointed to a picture of the First Presidency hanging on the wall of the bedroom.

“My son, just as sure as you see that picture, just as sure is the gospel true. The gospel of Jesus Christ has within it the power of saving every man and woman who will obey it, and in no other way can they ever obtain salvation in the kingdom of God. My son, always cling to the gospel. Be humble, be prayerful, be submissive to the priesthood, be true, be faithful to the covenants you have made with God. Never do anything that would displease God. Oh, what a blessing is the gospel. My son, be a good boy.”

Sister Nelson: I just love all those B’s. “Be humble, be prayerful, be submissive to the priesthood, be true, be faithful to the covenants you have made with God. . . . Be a good boy.” Six B’s brought to you by your departed

great-grandfather. He certainly sounds a lot like President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) with his six B’s.¹

President Nelson: He does, doesn’t he? It’s so precious to me that my grandfather would leave that record for us. We learned that his father’s children were subsequently sealed to him. So the reason for his visit was accomplished.

The Spirit of Elijah

President Nelson: A name of great significance in the scriptures explains why the family is so important. That name is Elijah. EL-I-JAH in Hebrew literally means “Jehovah is my God.”² Think of it! Embedded in Elijah’s name are the Hebrew terms for both the Father and the Son.

Sister Nelson: Elijah was the last prophet to hold the sealing power of the Melchizedek Priesthood before the time of Jesus Christ. Elijah’s mission was to turn the hearts of the children to the fathers, and the hearts of the fathers to the children, so they could be sealed, or else “the whole earth would be *utterly wasted* at his coming” (Joseph Smith—History 1:39; emphasis added). That’s pretty strong language.

President Nelson: I like to think about the spirit of Elijah as “a manifestation of the Holy Ghost bearing witness of the divine nature of the family.”³ According to the Bible Dictionary, “The power of Elijah is the sealing power of the priesthood by which things bound or loosed on earth are bound or loosed in heaven” (“Elijah”).



Sister Nelson: So when we say that the spirit of Elijah is moving upon people to encourage them to seek after their kindred dead, we're really saying that the Holy Ghost is prompting us to do those things that will allow families to be sealed eternally.

President Nelson: It's wonderful to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers by telling important family history stories in ways that are accessible and memorable. Perhaps having family history documents, stories, photos, and memorabilia always before our eyes can strengthen our testimonies (see Mosiah 1:5). As we place them on our walls, our tables, our computers, our iPads, and even our cell phones, maybe we will be prompted to make better choices and draw closer to the Lord and to our families.

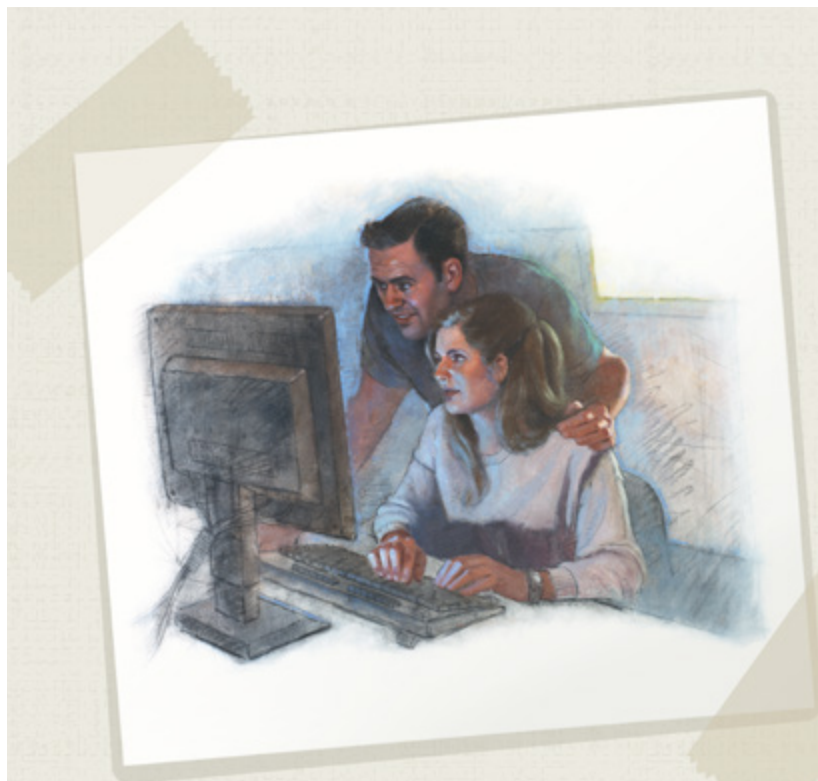
If we leave it at that level, however, we really haven't done enough. As Church members, our interest in family history work has been motivated by instruction from the Lord that our ancestors cannot be made perfect without us and that we cannot be made perfect without them (see D&C 128:15). That means we are to be linked together by the sacred sealing ordinances of the temple. We are to be strong links in the chain from our ancestors to our posterity. If our collections of stories and photos should ever become an end point in themselves—if we know who our ancestors are and know marvelous things about them, but we leave them stranded on the other side without their

ordinances—such diversion will not be of any help to our ancestors who remain confined in spirit prison.

Sister Nelson: Preserving ancestral stories is important, but it should never be at the expense of completing our ancestors' ordinance work. We need to make time for our ancestors' ordinance-qualifying information.

President Nelson: And that means sacrificing time we normally spend on other activities. We need to be spending more time in the temple and in doing family history research, which includes indexing.

Sister Nelson: Sacrifice does indeed bring forth the blessings of heaven.⁴ I have been blessed to find many ancestors who I feel confident were ready to make covenants with God and to receive their essential ordinances. Over time, I realized that if I was working on



an overwhelming project and I was out of time, energy, and ideas, if I would make a sacrifice of time by finding the ordinance-qualifying information for some ancestors or by going to the temple to be proxy for them, the heavens opened and the energy and ideas started flowing. Somehow I had enough time to meet my deadline. It was totally impossible, but it would happen every time. Temple and family history work bring me a joy that is truly not of this world.

Family History and Missionary Work

President Nelson: If I were a missionary today, my two best friends in the ward or branch where I served would be the ward mission leader and the ward temple and family history consultant.

People have an inborn desire to know something about their ancestors. That becomes a natural opportunity for our missionaries. As missionaries learn to love the people they teach, they will naturally ask about their families. “Are your parents living? Are your grandparents living? Do you know your four grandparents?” Conversations flow easily when those who are drawn to speak with the missionaries are invited to talk about the people they love.

At that point it can be natural for the missionaries, including member missionaries, to ask, “Do you know any of your great-grandparents? Do you know their names?” The probability is that investigators will not know the names of all eight of their great-grandparents.

Then the missionaries can make this suggestion: “I have a friend at our church who can help. If we could find the names of some or maybe even all of your great-grandparents, would it be worth a couple of hours of your time to find out who your great-grandparents are?” That friend at church, of course, is the ward temple and family history consultant.

Sister Nelson: I think it can be comforting for missionaries to know that they are never alone when they are finding and teaching those who are receptive to the truths of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. President George Q.



Cannon (1827–1901), who served as a counselor to four Presidents of the Church, taught that in these latter days, those who are joining the Church are joining precisely because their ancestors have been praying for one of their posterity to join the Church so that they, the ancestors, can receive their essential ordinances by proxy.⁵

Exaltation: A Family Affair

President Nelson: Exaltation is a family affair. Only through the saving ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ can families be exalted. The ultimate end for which we strive is that we become happy as a family—endowed, sealed, and prepared for eternal life in the presence of God.

Sister Nelson: Each Church class we attend, each time we serve, each covenant we make with God, each priesthood ordinance we receive, everything we do in the Church leads us to the holy temple, the house of the Lord. There is so much power available for a couple and for their children through the sealing ordinance when they keep their covenants.

President Nelson: Every day we choose where we want to live eternally by how we think, feel, speak, and act. Our Heavenly Father has declared that His work and His glory is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of His children (see Moses 1:39). But He *wants* us to choose to return to Him. He will not force us in any



way. The precision with which we keep our covenants shows Him just how much we want to return to live with Him. Each day brings us closer to or farther from our glorious possibility of eternal life. We each need to keep our covenants, repent daily, and seek to be more like our Savior. Then and only then can families be together forever.

Sister Nelson: It is my testimony that however fabulous your life is right now, or however discouraging and heartbreaking it may be, your involvement in temple and family history work will make it better. What do you need in your life right now? More love? More joy? More self-mastery? More peace? More meaningful moments? More of a feeling that you're making a difference? More fun? More answers to your soul-searching questions? More heart-to-heart connections with others? More understanding of what you are reading in the scriptures? More ability to love and to forgive? More ability to pray with power? More inspiration and creative ideas for your work and other projects? More time for what really matters?

I entreat you to make a sacrifice of time to the Lord by increasing the time you spend doing temple and family history work, and then watch what happens. It is my testimony that when we show the Lord we are serious about helping our ancestors, the heavens will open and we will receive all that we need.

President Nelson: We can be inspired all day long about temple and family history experiences others have had. But we must do something to actually experience the joy ourselves. I would like to extend a challenge to each one of us so that the wonderful feeling of this work

can continue and even increase. I invite you to prayerfully consider what kind of sacrifice—preferably a sacrifice of time—you can make in order to do more temple and family history work this year.

We are engaged in the work of Almighty God. He lives. Jesus is the Christ. This is His Church. We are His covenant children. He can count on us. ■

From a presentation at the RootsTech 2017 Family History Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah, on February 11, 2017. To watch a recording of the presentation, visit lds.org/go/1017Nelson.

NOTES

1. See Gordon B. Hinckley, “A Prophet’s Counsel and Prayer for Youth,” *Ensign*, Jan. 2001, 2–11.
2. Bible Dictionary, “Elijah.”
3. Russell M. Nelson, “A New Harvest Time,” *Ensign*, May 1998, 34.
4. See “Praise to the Man,” *Hymns*, no. 27.
5. See *Gospel Truth: Discourses and Writings of President George Q. Cannon*, comp. Jerreld L. Newquist, 2 vols. (1974), 2:88–89.

